



TONY BOCK/TORONTO STAR

Mandy Percy and Elizabeth Cornell, both 13, admire a gold medal won by Olympic rower Marnie McBean (rear), with Jazz Kama], 17, at Girl Event in Mississauga.

Mutual admiration at Girl Event

Olympic rower among speakers

Fight peer media pressure, Girls told

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EDUCATION REPORT

Take responsibility, take risks, and be kind to yourself.

Standard advice but the message resonated in a new way yesterday as 1,240 teen girls got to hear how it worked for some of Canada's most successful women.

In an energetic gathering that more closely resembled a revival meeting than a school assembly teenagers from across southwestern Ontario cheered their heroes, including Olympic medallist Marnie McBean and Mississauga Mayor Hazel McCallion, who had themselves come to

cheer on the girls.

In the daylong Girl Event, the Mississauga Living Arts Centre was for a few hours turned into a squealing happy mutual admiration society given over to making girls feel good. Even the men's washrooms in the theatre were being used by the girls.

The idea was to stage an electric, theatre style esteem-building exercise in which girls could feel like participants rather than passive listeners.

Experts agree low esteem leads to many classic teen problems ranging from suicide and depression to pregnancy and addiction, but teachers and parents are finding it increasingly difficult to fight the peer and media bombardment that culminates in adolescence.

Yesterday's conference was designed to offer alternatives,

rather than dwell on problems, said organizers.

As the girls chattered over their bagged lunches, multi-medallist McBean stopped at their tables eliciting cheers from her young fans. The goldwinning rower said she was delighted to lend her support to the event and reinforced to the girls aged 13 to 18 that a single day could make a difference in their lives.

"I looked rowing up in the phone book one day and my life has been gifted ever since," -said McBean

Despite the obvious generation gap, even McCallion also drew wild applause from the teenagers with her folksy advice to 'think like a man act like a lady and work like a dog.' The mayor, who returned last week from Africa from an international conference on

women's health, encouraged the girls to make the world a better place for women and children.

But it was Toronto teen counsellor and author Karyn Gordon who brought down the house with her motivational, Spill Your Guts Talk Show presentation. Dressed in pink flared jeans and a hip denim coat - an outfit any teen would

'Think like a man, act like a lady and work like a dog.'

Hazel McCallion, Mississauga Mayor

admire - Gordon warned the teens to stop blaming their circumstances and other people for their failures.

As a teen Gordon overcame a learning disability and earned a Ph.D at 22.

Acknowledging that teens have limited control over some factors in their lives such as

their families, she encouraged the girls to look at factors they can control.

"There are a lot of things you can't control," she said. "But we can choose our friends, the magazines we read, the TV shows we watch."

Gordon also addressed girls' tendency toward cattiness and backstabbing when dealing with conflict.

Guidance counsellor Carolyn Callaghan brought 50 girls three hours by bus from Petrolia, Ont. To the event. "Grade

10 girls are really vulnerable," she said. That's when parental issues, growing personal responsibility and peer pressure seem to collide.

The Girl Event is scheduled to tour Toronto, Calgary and other Canadian Cities in the spring.